

Economic Change and Mossi Acculturation

which requires sharing and compliance with the authority of kinsmen in the Yatenga whom they have never known. Forced to return to the Yatenga to assist the extended family there, they are frustrated in their efforts to form a permanent identification with their residence at the irrigation project. More efficient than their elders in communicating with the Europeans and in learning their techniques, they are thwarted by a social organization which denies expression to their initiative. The older men, given no share in the administration of the project and with little understanding of its objectives, believe that they are being exploited by the Europeans and that they would be more successful if they were to follow their own system of production and marketing. 177 182

The Mossi have learned that the official policy of the Niger Irrigation Project specifies their participation in administration through "indigenous agricultural associations," and even through their "collaboration" within the board of directors; but they do not actually participate in either of these. Possibly the fact that the Mossi have had no previous experience of participation in democratic forms discouraged the Europeans in their early efforts to include them in the administration of the project, but such participation implies a profound cultural adjustment and would require patience on the part of the Europeans. Whatever the case, the fact that the colonists know they have a right to participate in the administration and yet are denied it only serves to increase their conviction that they are being exploited.

Unsure of their rights to the land, unaware of the goals of the project, and inhibited by their artificially maintained tradition from forming meaningful social relationships in the area of resettlement, the Mossi make little permanent identification with the Niger project and its objectives. They say that it is like the hut a man builds in his fields during the rainy season; when the crop is harvested, he will return to the house of his fathers.

The relatively rapid and easy adaptation to the new natural setting and the supernatural forces which govern it is probably due both to the lack of European interference in this aspect of the colonists' lives and to the traditional permissiveness of West African religions. On the other hand, the greatest obstacle to adjustment seems to be just that aspect of the changed situation which was designed to facilitate it: the reconstruction and artificial maintenance of a social structure which cannot be efficiently integrated with the new economic organization. This structure has been maintained with such rigidity that it actually impedes Mossi efforts to reinterpret their institutions in terms of their new situation.

The Mossi who have returned from the Niger project have had little effect on their kinsmen in the Yatenga. Islamized colonists are often [56] ●

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177 too young to be listened to seriously by their elders. If they are returning
 182 as senior members of their lineages, and since their power and prestige
 561 are dependent on the maintenance of the socio-religious status quo, they
 are unlikely to be innovators. For these same reasons the few changes in
 the social organization which have occurred at the Niger project have
 had little effect on the social environment of the Yatenga.

177 Most of the agricultural techniques acquired in the Sudan are useless
 241 in the Yatenga because of the absence of irrigation. Even were this not
 so, the rationale of the modern agricultural methods employed at the Ni-
 ger project is not explained to the settlers; they are required to follow the
 instructions of the European agronomists or be penalized. As a result, the
 improved agricultural techniques of the Europeans are regarded as just
 another of the white man's incomprehensible ways and are quickly for-
 gotten.

177 The response of the Mossi to resettlement at the Niger Irrigation
 182 Project shows that in a situation of rapid cultural change, retentions or
 changes on the superficial level of form are misleading; nor is a brief
 statement of the functional interrelationship between institutions suffi-
 cient. The final reality of an institution lies in its meaning for the mem-
 bers of the society in which it exists, and its final evaluation must be
 based on its capacity to fulfil the changing needs of individuals. This
 concept is essential to an understanding of the colonists' dissatisfaction
 with the effort of the Niger project administration to reproduce artifi-
 cially a static model of their traditional social structure. This can also be
 seen in their reaction to a changed supernatural order; an analysis which
 failed to descend beneath the level of form would miss the significant
 fact that their psychological response to religion and the basic premises
 of their theology have remained unaffected by an "Islamization" which
 amounts to little more than adopting certain new propitiatory usages.

Apparently not understanding the interrelationship of cultural institu-
 tions and the sanctions which give them meaning, the administration of
 the Niger Irrigation Project sought to modify the Mossi organization of
 economic activity without referring to the traditional values to which it
 is vitally related. Seeming to regard the indigenous culture as little more
 than a compendium of savage rites upon which superior European usages
 need only be imposed in order to prevail, such an approach reveals a
 failure to comprehend both the complexity and the tenacity of the Mossi
 cultural heritage.

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868 The girls remain by their mother's side. They fetch water with her, learn how to pound millet, how to cook, etc. When they are eight or nine, they are taught how to spin cotton.

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882 The boys sleep in their mother's hut until they are circumcised, that is, until they are about thirteen years old. Thereafter, they sleep in a special hut, kombarogo, with all the other circumcised boys of the compound. The girls sleep in their mother's hut until they are married.

• 561 Little boys are called kondibili kirisé, biribili kirisé, or komkirisé (komkiriga in the singular). Little girls are called kompougouli kirisé or bipougouli kirisé. The older girls are kompougouli beda or bipougouli beda. The older boys or young men (they are considered as such once they are circumcised) are rasamba (rasanga in the singular). Young girls are called pourousada or pougousada (pourousadaba in the plural).

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575 Education of children among themselves. Societies. —Mossi children form societies among themselves. These are called nam (they are the same as the Bambara ton or flambolo). There is a society for boys and one for girls in the small villages. In the large villages, as in Ouahigouya, for example, these societies are formed by village quarters.

Each society has its chief and its high dignitaries: its Moro Naba who rules over it with his four ministers. The girls also have their Pourousada Moro Naba and four female ministers. These societies are devoted to play, drinking, tom-tom playing, and dancing.

Each member must furnish a certain number of cowries: the chiefs /256/ give 200 or 300; the mere rasamba, 100; the kondibili, 50; the kondibili-kirisé, 30. The Moro Naba of the society collects the dues, and he is also the treasurer.

Another source of income for the society derives from work performed for the people of the village, the owners of fields. The boys do not merely go and offer their services. When someone needs a helping hand with his field, he goes to the Moro Naba of the society who places the whole group at his disposal for a fee. Payment is made in millet which the society uses to make dolo for its celebrations.

Another source of income derives from fining members for lapses in their duties to the society. The Moro Naba of the nam fines those who arrive late when called for work on someone's field or those who go on an errand or a short trip without notifying him in advance.

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604 indirectly from the good will of his ancestral spirits whose benevolence Ego often invokes.

Ambivalence follows from other characteristics of the relationship. Resentment of Ego's depredations of her husband's property and jealous concern for the inheritance rights of her own children appear to be at least partially balanced by a share of the affection her husband shows for Ego. However, joking in this relationship is asymmetrical. The mother's brother's wife takes the more aggressive role, and from the vehemence of her joking, and the structural nature of the relationship, it appears likely that amity lies less heavily in the balance than hostility. The groups to which the two parties belong are equal in status. Their respective positions within them, of course, are not, and this is reflected in the aforementioned asymmetry. Each party is obviously independent of the authority system of the other.

576 Joking Between Siblings-in-Law

642 Siblings-in-law who joke are separated by the rule of sib exogamy observed among the Mossi. Reciprocity is basic to the marriage contract that unites their respective kin groups. Several factors tend to create ambivalence in the relationship. Both kin groups—in particular, the extended families of the two marriage partners—profit from the reciprocal tie established between them, but possible failure on the part of either group to reciprocate adequately, particularly with regard to marriage payments, constitutes a persistent source of potential friction. Moreover, the Mossi observe the levirate. Joking between siblings-in-law who are potential spouses, yet are presently constrained by a prohibition against adultery, has frequently been ascribed the function of reducing tension in a situation of conflict. The kin groups of siblings-in-law are always structurally equivalent because groups occupying significantly different strata in Mossi society do not intermarry. As members of autonomous descent groups the participants are obviously independent of one another.

574 Joking Between Sibs

Sibs (or lineages) whose members joke with one another are, of course, also separate groups.² They are always united by a strong tradition of reciprocal social and economic aid. Ambivalence apparently stems from the conflict between this tradition of reciprocity and actual competing claims to land. The origin of joking relationships between two descent groups is often ascribed to the alleged fact that, when they first arrived in the village, leaders of both falsely claimed to the chief that he and his kinsmen had arrived first, and thus had a prior right to land, and that the members of the other group were their slaves. Despite their jocular allegations, both groups are in fact structurally equal and independent.

571 Joking Between Age-Sets

Joking between age-sets within an age-grade varies with the generational

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57/ position of the set in Mossi society. In the years immediately following initiation the members are much involved in group activities, e.g., the arrangement of social dances, courtship, and co-operation in work groups composed of male and female age-sets, and during this period joking is important. As the members attain adult status the groups tend to lose their structural integrity; their minor corporate functions dwindle and ultimately disappear as the responsibility of the young people to their kin groups increases. With this shift in emphasis, joking behavior also diminishes.

While it lasts, however, this type of joking likewise has a structural context characterized by the attributes already identified. Age-sets are structurally separate within the age-grade. Their relations are reciprocal: individual members co-operate in the arrangement of one another's sexual liaisons; they pool their labor and share the profits they earn as members of their co-operative work organizations; and young men often leave Yatenga as migrant laborers in groups organized on the basis of age-grade membership, thereby reinforcing many of the reciprocal ties established in the work groups. The ambivalence characteristic of the relationship is perhaps best explained as the rivalry of peers. Since there is no status hierarchy within a Mossi age-grade, the age-sets are structurally equivalent and independent.

57/ 628 Intervillage Joking

When intervillage joking is institutionalized it may involve all the members of each community. However, I believe it is particularly expected of their respective chiefs. In either case, the participants are separated by their differing political affiliations. The inhabitants of each village are expected to reciprocate in one another's defense, to be mutually hospitable, and to co-operate in the regulation of land tenure at their frontiers. Ambivalence derives from a history of past hostility, dating perhaps from an earlier period when competition for new land was keener and the expanding kingdom did not yet encompass all the villages now within its borders. Such villages are always structurally equivalent in status within the political system, and each is independent of the other.

57/ 628 Joking Between Ethnic Groups

The joking relationship which the Mossi maintain with the Gurunsi and the Samogho peoples, among others, appears to involve the same structural characteristics. However, I learned of this relationship only shortly before I left Yatenga, and a more certain statement concerning it must therefore await further research. It is certain that such joking occurs; I am unsure only of the number of other ethnic groups involved³ and of the relevant details of their historical relations to the Mossi of Yatenga. The groups involved are again separate. There is an expectation that members of each group should extend hospitality and assistance to members of the other. As with villages whose inhabitants joke, the participants in this relationship are ambivalent in their attitudes; the present expectation of co-operation is coupled with a past